ISSUES PAPER 9:

ADDRESSING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Topic A: General questions

1. How effective are the policies, procedures and/or practices schools have adopted to minimise or prevent, report and respond to risks and instances of child sexual abuse?

The Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (CSAPP Inc.) developed, implemented and evaluated school and community-based child sexual abuse prevention programs across Victoria and jurisdictions further afield from 1995 – 2005. In my experience as the Founder and Executive Director of CSAPP, working with early childhood, primary, secondary and special/Special Developmental Schools (SDS) within Australia, I found most educational institutions have policies, procedures and/or practices relating identifying and responding to child maltreatment. However, I also witnessed a number of identifiable limitations which can leave any institution or organisation vulnerable in its child protection efforts.

a. Leadership and Institutional Culture. If the leadership or culture within the institution or organisation is lacking any child protection policies (if they exist) will be poorly supported and poorly implemented. For example, an excellent policy or set of procedures might be in place, but if staff are aware that the Principal is insensitive, even punitive, towards issues of child sexual abuse, even the most well-intentioned, sensitive, caring and diligent staff member will feel discouraged from reporting suspected sexual abuse. This will be particularly true if suspicions or allegations concern a fellow staff member of well-positioned member of the community.

b. Professional Development. Most schools provide in-service professional development to school staff on child protection issues including recognising and responding to potential child sexual abuse cases (including requirements of Mandatory Reporting). This is commendable, however, given the extent of child sexual abuse in our community and the effects of sexual abuse on children and adolescents, more investment should be made to ensure this topic is a priority in school staff training. The staff training should involve all staff, from leadership positions, to teaching and also including non-teaching staff, in order to ensure that everyone is fully aware of the importance of child protection issues, including their roles and responsibilities if child sexual abuse is suspected or identified. This will develop an institutional culture where children's rights to be protected from sexual abuse is promoted and encouraged.

c. Programs for Children and Young People. It is also commendable that child abuse prevention / personal safety topics have been introduced into the curriculum for most primary and/or secondary schools, including special and Special Developmental Schools (SDS). It would be beneficial if
additional funding was made available so that schools are able to provide more than the minimum requirement, for example, to be able to enhance their own internal curricula by hosting a specialist external service provider programs, such as CSAPP’s “Staying Safe With People” program, the CAPS “Safe Families, Safe Kids” program, Bravehearts’ “Ditto Keep Safe Adventure” program, the “Protective Behaviours” program, amongst numerous others. While there are a variety of education programs available for primary school-aged children, there are far less available for children attending special/SDS schools. There are also significantly fewer options available at secondary school level, where students are still vulnerable to sexual assault, or may be struggling with the effects of childhood sexual abuse, and/or who are vulnerable to additional trauma as a result of childhood sexual abuse, such as substance abuse, risk-taking behaviours, homelessness, mental health disturbances and suicide.

The Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (CSAPP Inc) program for primary-school aged children ("Staying Safe With People") was thoroughly evaluated (using a pre/post with control group experimental design including 2, 6 and 12 month follow-up). The results were extremely positive indicating that the participation in the program resulted in a significant increase in knowledge and skills related to child sexual abuse ("unsafe touching of private parts") and that these gains were evident at all points of follow-up. I will provide the introductory chapters of my thesis as a confidential attachment to this submission. It is worth noting that this doctoral thesis was awarded the 2001 Vice Chancellor’s Medal for Excellence in Research (Victoria University).

d. Allegations involving teachers/school staff. It is imperative that strong policies and procedures are put in place to ensure that if a student/child discloses sexual (or other) abuse by a member of school/institution staff that the alleged offender is removed from their position pending the results of investigation. The alleged offender must be removed from having access to other children during the investigation period (that is, not moved to a different school). This is of critical importance so that any child who discloses sexual or other abuse by a member of staff does not feel afraid for disclosing the alleged abuse. It is also very important for adults who are supporting the child, including other staff members. Such a response should be mandatory. Failure to act protectively in this way should result in criminal (and civil) action for the alleged perpetrator and those in leadership positions who failed to act protectively towards the alleged victim.

e. Whistle-blower protection. Current policies and procedures could be significantly improved by providing additional support to staff members (teaching and non-teaching), especially the development and implementation of a Whistle-blower Protection policy to protect teachers (and/or other staff) who wish to report cases that their supervisor/s may not want reported (for example, due to a conflict of interest), and for teachers who wish to report concerns about a colleague. Such a policy should be supported by Whistle-blower protection legislation, drafted specifically in relation to the reporting of child sexual abuse suspicions and/or allegations. Individuals found to have obstructed the reporting of suspicions and/or allegations of child sexual abuse/assault should be subjected to independent investigation and/or criminal (and civil) intervention in order to protect both the alleged child-victim as well as the whistle-blower.

Enhanced investment in all of the above will significantly enhance an institution/organisation’s existing policies, procedures and/or practices and will help build and strengthen a culture where children’s rights to be protected from sexual abuse is prioritised.
2. How can compliance with legislative obligations and child protection policy requirements by schools and their staff be encouraged? Should there be penalties for non-compliance, and if so, in what form?

a. **Professional Development.** Mandatory Professional Development training should be funded for all pre, primary and secondary schools (including special and SDS schools). This training should cover the issue of child maltreatment generally, and specially, the issue of child sexual assault, including what it is, the indicators and effects, what to do if you suspect a child is being or has been sexually abused, what to do if a child/young person discloses sexual abuse, the legal requirements for reporting suspected/alleged cases to the relevant authorities, protection for whistle-blowers, and taking care of yourself/receiving support if you are involved in reporting or supporting a victim/s of child sexual assault. Failure to report suspected cases of child sexual assault (that meet the threshold for reporting) should result in serious penalties, criminal and civil.

3. What are the particular strengths, protective factors, risks or vulnerabilities and challenges faced by schools within different education systems in preventing, identifying, reporting and responding to child sexual abuse? Is there any rationale for having different legislative obligations and policy requirements relating to child protection for government and non-government schools?

In my professional opinion, there is no justification for having different legislative obligations and policy requirements relating to child protection for government and non-government schools. The UN Rights of the Child applies to ALL children, whether they attend public or private schools. Private schools may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing a conflict of interest if allegations involve fee-paying parents/caregivers of child-victims.

4. Do the nine elements of the 2009 National Safe Schools Framework effectively make schools safer for students? Are there any additional elements schools should adopt?

a. **Whistle-blower Protection.** It is recommended that schools and other educational institutions formally adopt a Whistle-blower Protection policy for reporting suspected child maltreatment, for example, when a fellow colleague/employee is suspected of abusing a child, or when a superior refuses or discourages the reporting of allegations of/suspected abuse.

b. **Mandatory Reporter Guide.** It is highly recommended that a Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) should be adopted by all Australian jurisdictions to help professionals (and others) assess whether the information they have reaches a reportable threshold. The US Children's Research Centre (CRC) developed the NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide, which has been immensely successful in this way. [http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/reporting_concerns/mandatory_reporter_guide](http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/reporting_concerns/mandatory_reporter_guide)

Other jurisdictions are in the processing of adopting an MRG too (e.g., South Australia, Northern Territory). The MRG is an extremely useful tool to assist professionals working with children and young people determine the best course of action for them to take if they have concerns regarding the safety of a child/young person in their care.
5. What regulatory, oversight or governance mechanisms are needed to ensure schools have adopted 'safe school' elements? How has their effectiveness been evaluated?

I will leave this question for others with more expertise in this specific area to respond to.

**Topic B: Governance and leadership**

1. How could school governance arrangements be strengthened to provide better protection for children? What should be the role of: students, staff, principals, school councils or boards, governing bodies and education departments in reviewing current safety arrangements, incidents, decision-making and promoting child safety within individual schools?

In addition to all of the responses above, I recommend that a specific service be established in each State and Territory for school-related professionals to obtain information, support, guidance, policies, and procedures regarding child maltreatment. I recommend that such a service should be independent of government Departments of Education and other non-government education institutions to reduce the risk of a conflict of interest which in turn increases the risk of cases of child sexual abuse by professionals being covered up.

2. What governance arrangements should be in place to ensure that teaching and non-teaching staff and other members of school communities have the support and confidence to identify and report suspected child sexual abuse without fear of negative repercussions for themselves or their careers?

Please see my response to Topic A (1). As stated previously, a Whistle-blower Protection policy should be adopted by all education institutions and should be supported by appropriate and specific legislation. An independent service (mentioned above, Topic B. 1.) could provide support for professionals who report allegations of child sexual (and other) abuse by a colleague. Such support is vitally important as research demonstrates, as have the findings of the Royal Commission to date, the whistle-blowers often suffer greatly for acting protectively towards children and behaving honourably.

**Topic C: Protection and support services for children and specific student populations**

1. What needs to be taken into account to ensure that the full diversity of students are equally protected and equipped to voice concerns? Are the needs of children with particular vulnerabilities, such as children with disability, adequately addressed?

a. **Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Education for Especially Vulnerable Populations.** All schools, including special/SDS should incorporate child sexual abuse prevention (“personal safety”/“protective behaviours”) education into their curriculum. Programs and resources are available for most populations, including children with disabilities who are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation (Briggs & Hawkins, 1995). For example, CSAPP’s “Staying Safe With People” program, which has been developed in consultation with specialist-education professionals, for both primary and secondary school special/SDS populations. CSAPP has produced two excellent educational DVDs for primary and secondary special needs school levels, respectively. Unfortunately CSAPP lacked the resources to distribute these DVDs widely. CSAPP has also developed an accompanying Activity Manual (“Staying Safe, Playing Safe”) for primary-aged children with
disabilities. Unfortunately, CSAPP lacked the resources to publish and widely distribute this valuable resource. Both the educational DVDs and Activity Manual were based on extensive research.

The following is a quote from a Principal of a Victorian Special Developmental School in response to the present submission. The Principal supported the implementation of the CSAPP “Staying Safe With People” program at her school for many years:

“I remember we had to write submissions to the local council to get enough funding each year to fund our "Staying Safe With People" program at the SDS. There was no provision in the curriculum or the school's budget to provide this program. But by participating in your pilot program it did highlight the importance and it did lead us into writing it into our curriculum and providing professional development for all staff. But as you (the author) stated at this stage it is heavily reliant on the attitude and support of school leaders which can vary from school to school. These and other variants need to be addressed for the safety and wellbeing of all of our children.” (Former Principal, Victorian Special Developmental School).

Unfortunately, such specialist programs and resources are significantly fewer than mainstream programs and resources. Specialist child sexual abuse prevention programs and resources should therefore be funded as an urgent priority given statistics around the incidence and impact of child sexual abuse, particularly amongst extra vulnerable population groups.

b. Adult Education. All programs for students should be accompanied by professional development for school staff, as well as information sessions for parents to promote a comprehensive and holistic community response to the problem of child sexual abuse. Results of the evaluation of the school-based CSAPP program indicated the adult education components to be vitally important in the effectiveness of the programs for students (Michaelson, 2001).

2. What support services should schools provide for victims and others affected by child sexual abuse, either directly or through referral to external providers? Are schools able to ensure these services are provided and, if not, why not?

1. Response Team. Allegations of child sexual abuse within a school or other institutional setting require a multi-disciplinary response to be most effective. The evaluation of the CSAPP program found that the Response Team component of the program model was integral, in fact, fundamental, to the program’s overall success. The CSAPP Response Team was established for each participating school and comprised of:

* School Welfare Coordinator (or equivalent)
* Program facilitator/s
* Representative from the local Child Protection unit
* Representative from the local Police Sex Offence and Child Abuse Unit
* Representative from the local sexual abuse counselling service
* Representative from any relevant local services.

The Response Team met at the beginning of the school program. The representatives gave presentations at both the Parent Information sessions and the Professional Development sessions for the school staff. They also often participated in the program for children as special guest speakers to talk about their role in keeping children safe. The response team met in the middle of the program for students to discuss any issues arising, and then again at the end of the program. Disclosures of sexual abuse by participating students were therefore responded to in a sensitive and collaborative manner. Non-offending caregivers and their children were able to put a face to a name and were able to get the best support possible. All participants agreed this was an invaluable
component of the program (Michaelson, 2001). It is recommended that consideration be given to incorporating such an integrated approach to child sexual abuse prevention at the local level across all jurisdictions.

2. Access to Counselling and Support. In CSAPP’s experience, apart from the operations of the Response Team (mentioned above), services in schools are currently inadequate to provide counselling and support for children who have been sexually abused. School counselling (internally provided) should be given adequate funding to cover the emotional needs of sexually (and other) abused children in the school environment. Funding should also be made available for schools to offer on or off-site counselling by an external sexual assault counselling service providers where appropriate. School-based counselling services should be an urgent priority given the widespread incidence of child sexual abuse and the long-term effects of this crime, on the child-victim, on families and on the community (e.g., substance abuse, criminality, homelessness, mental health disturbance, and/or suicide, amongst others).

3. What measures should boarding schools take to ensure that students are and feel safe? Are particular measures needed for boarding schools catering to specific populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students, or students in regional and remote areas? Will the draft National Boarding Standards for Australian Schools provide boarding students with stronger protection against child sexual abuse?

a. Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Education. As mentioned throughout this submission, adequate resources should be provided so that all organisations can access child sexual abuse prevention education. The importance of Whistle-blower policies, procedures and supporting legislation cannot be over-emphasized in order for all students to be better protected from sexual abuse within institutional settings.

4. Do factors such as geographical isolation, distance from policy makers, and staff and student retention affect regional and remote schools’ abilities to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse? If so, how might they be addressed?

Factors such as geographical isolation, distance from policy makers, and staff and student retention can affect regional and remote schools’ abilities to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. The development and provision of online professional development for educational staff (discussed in Topic A2) should be made available for regional and remote schools to assist with access issues. Resources should be allocated to enable the development and implementation of such online professional development workshops. As mentioned previously, participation in such Professional Development should be compulsory for all employees, from leadership to teaching to non-teaching staff.

5. What sorts of measures are needed to help protect younger children from the risk of sexual abuse by older children?

a. Education. This issue of children experiencing potentially and actual “unsafe touching of private parts” by anyone (for example, someone known or someone unknown (ie, a stranger), someone old or someone young, someone who is male or someone who is female, etc, etc) and safety rules that can be used by a child or young person if anyone is making them feel unsafe have been incorporated into most school-based “personal safety/protective behaviours” programs for children (for example,
b. Response. In the event that a younger child discloses sexual abuse (or “problem sexualised behaviour/s”) by an older child at the same school, the matter should be reported to the relevant Department of Child Protection, as per any other cases of suspected/alleged child maltreatment. However, given the sensitivities involved, a multi-disciplinary team of local experts should be called to meet to discuss the best approach to dealing with the situation within the school setting (please see “Response Team” mentioned previously). The needs of the victim should always be the primary concern. Every effort should be made to determine the cause of the older child’s offending behaviour (e.g., are they a victim too? are they getting access to pornography? etc), and enrolment in a counselling and/or children’s sexualised behaviour program for the child should be compulsory (as this constitutes an important form of primary prevention). Resources should be allocated to the expansion of programs dealing with children who are demonstrating sexually inappropriate/offending behaviours, as most teaching and related professionals would agree that this problem is becoming increasingly widespread.

Topic D: Registration of non-government schools, not-for-profit and corporate entities

1. To what extent should a non-government school’s registration be conditional on it having strong child safe principles, policies or procedures (for example, concerning student health and wellbeing and complaints management)? How can the adequacy of individual schools’ approaches be assessed?
   No response.

2. What role could or should insurance, organisational or directors’ liability, as well as regulation by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and Australian Securities and Investments Commission, play where a registered school or corporate body fails to prevent, identify, report or respond to child sexual abuse?
   Not sure.

Topic E: Education, training, professional support and primary prevention

1. What obligations should schools have to ensure that their teaching and non-teaching staff are aware of and comply with applicable codes of conduct, professional standards or child protection policies?

Please see Topic A2 and other relevant responses throughout this document. It is also recommended that an independent organisation (see Topic B. 1) conduct regular school and other related institutional audits regarding compliance with child protection legislation, policies and procedures, in the same way that Early Learning Centres are subjected to annual regulation audits, and charities working with children are subjected to audits concerning compliance with Working With Children checks for their staff and volunteers.
2. **What role does teacher education, training and professional support (including university study, pre and in-service training, and mentoring/support), play in equipping individual teachers with skills and confidence to identify behaviours indicative of, and to appropriately respond to risks or incidents of, child sexual abuse, and to children displaying problem sexual behaviour?**

In addition to the responses above (e.g., A2), child protection education, including sexual abuse prevention, should be incorporated into all tertiary and other courses for educational services and other child-related professions (such as early education, Social Work, Counselling, etc). A specific Child Protection unit should cover all forms of child maltreatment, including child sexual abuse. Topics should cover all forms of child maltreatment and should include, but not be limited to:

- what it is (definitions, legislation, etc);
- relevant epidemiological research (demographic and other incidence and risk factors);
- the effects on the victim, family and society; indicators/signs;
- how to respond if you suspect a child has been maltreated (including relevant legislation, policies and procedures, including Whistle-blower policies and legislation);
- how to respond sensitively and effectively to a child’s disclosure;
- documenting evidence correctly and effectively;
- how to report your concerns to your relevant Child Protection service;
- Whistle-blower policies and procedures;
- And accessing further information and/or support, including relevant services.

3. **What should school systems do to ensure their schools consistently deliver effective sexual abuse prevention education? Do such programs address barriers to children disclosing abuse, including the specific needs of children with disability, with English as a second language or with other particular vulnerabilities?**

a. **School-based child sexual abuse prevention education.** It is recommended that funding be made available for schools to enhance their own internal “protective behaviours/personal safety” curricula by hosting a specialist external service provider programs, such as CSAPP’s “Staying Safe With People” program, the CAPS “Safe Families, Safe Kids” program, Bravehearts’ “Ditto Keep Safe Adventure” program, the “Protective Behaviours” program, amongst numerous others. As noted previously in this submission, research has indicated that, when combined with parent education and teacher training, participation in prevention education programs can significantly increase participants’ knowledge and skills related to child sexual abuse prevention and that these gains can be maintained over a significant period time (Michaelson, 2001).

As noted above, there are a number of school-based programs currently available, and most cover the same or similar content delivered in different ways. Content generally covers:

- Identification of feelings,
- safe vs unsafe feelings,
- early warning signs,
- safe vs unsafe touching,
- being aware of your personal safety with strangers and people you know,
- private body parts have special safety rules,
- personal safety rules such as the No-Go-Tell rule,
- the “helping hand” or personal safety network (who to tell),
- Persistence (keep telling until someone believes you and helps you be safe again).
Programs generally address issues such as victims being made to feel guilty or responsible for the abuse, overcoming the barriers to disclosure, helping a friend who has been abused, amongst other related topics.

The CSAPP program is one of the few Australian child sexual abuse prevention programs to be based on research and to have been extensively evaluated (Michaelson, 2003; see Attachment 1). It is highly recommended that all such programs be based on empirical research regarding the efficacy of content and delivery, and that they are continually monitored and evaluated (internally and/or externally) for quality assurance.

As noted earlier, while there are a variety of education programs available for primary school-aged children, there are far fewer programs and resources available for children attending special/SDS schools. There are also significantly fewer options available at secondary school level, where students are still vulnerable to sexual assault, or may be struggling with the effects of childhood sexual abuse, and/or who are vulnerable to additional trauma as a result of childhood sexual abuse, such as substance abuse, risk-taking behaviours, homelessness, mental health disturbances and suicide.

CSAPP Inc. provided a comprehensive “Day Program” of a variety of 1.5 hours (“double-period”) workshops covering a range of issues relevant to the issues noted above. These included:

- A 25 minute live theatre performance for students on the topic of childhood sexual abuse
- Sexual Abuse Prevention workshop
- Assertiveness and Self Defence by a qualified and highly experienced Self Defence Instructor and Martial Arts expert
- Bullying Prevention
- Safe Party ing
- Suicide Prevention
- Positive Relationships for Young Men (facilitated by a specialist male presenter).

Qualitative feedback was collected from all program participants, and students were given the opportunity to ask questions confidentially and have their questions answered in a follow-up CSAPP magazine. A copy of the CSAPP magazine was given to each student and the school library.

On the basis of research into the efficacy of these programs, it is recommended that students should participate in at least one externally delivered program every two years to ensure the information is remembered and regularly reinforced by children. Schools should be given the resources they need to adequately follow up these specialised programs up in their own internally delivered “personal safety/protective behaviours” curricula (for example, the “Ditto In A Box” set by Bravehearts).

Organisations that provide these services and resources should be provided with funding to ensure their material can be accessed by all populations (e.g., non-English-speaking backgrounds).

**Topic F: Reporting, information sharing, complaints and investigations**

1. **What barriers or fears might discourage or prevent individuals working in or with schools from reporting suspected child sexual abuse (whether the abuse is perpetrated by colleagues, volunteers, other students, other members of the school community or family members)? How could those barriers be addressed?**
There are numerous barriers and fears that serve to discourage or prevent individuals working in or with schools from reporting suspected child sexual abuse (whether the abuse is perpetrated by colleagues, volunteers, other students, other members of the school community or family members). These may include the following:

- Lack of information, education and support on the topic of child sexual abuse
- The potential reporter is not confident that the child’s life will be better with / after government intervention
- A conflict of interest (e.g., the alleged perpetrator pays a lot in school fees to the school; the potential reporter knows the family and likes them; the alleged perpetrator is the Principal’s best mate; the alleged perpetrator holds a prominent, powerful or otherwise influential position in the community)
- The potential reporter is confused regarding whether or not they have sufficient information to report the suspected abuse and that if that by reporting they might make things worse for the child
- The alleged perpetrator has made overt or covert threats to the child and/or staff member who is the recipient of the disclosure or a potential reporter
- The alleged offender is part of an organised network of sex offenders (multi-perpetrator, multi-victim case)
- The potential reporter is aware that the case would end up in the hands of the alleged perpetrator/s (i.e., corruption)

The following strategies could help minimise the risks noted above:

a. Whole School Approach. The adoption of a whole school approach (i.e., Staff Development, Parent Information sessions, Programs for Students, and a Response Team made up of school and local service representatives) would greatly assist in promoting a culture of protecting children from sexual abuse, and responding appropriately when concerns/disclosures arise.

b. Whistle-blower Protection. As noted throughout this submission, it is highly recommended that Whistle-blower Protection policies and procedures should be developed and incorporated into every educational institution and that specific legislation be adopted to support such a policy.


2. How effective are mandatory reporting and reportable conduct schemes in assisting to identify and report child sexual abuse in schools? If necessary, how might these schemes be refined to better suit school environments?

Mandatory Reporting legislation has been beneficial to children in many demonstrable ways. However, one of the side-effects of the introduction of Mandatory Legislation has been the inability with Protective Services Intake centres to cope with the vast number of notifications. See Children’s Research Centre and other related research. www.nccglobal.org/assessment/structured-decision-making-sdm-model

Consequently, a number of jurisdictions, both nationally and internationally, have developed and implemented a Mandatory Reporter Guide in collaboration with the US Children’s Research Center. The MRG has been a very successful and useful tool to help child protection systems deal with the ever-increasing number of notifications of child maltreatment. Having studied the CRC Structured
Decision Making (SDM) system extensively, and implementing parts of it in the Northern Territory, I recommend that state and jurisdiction develop and implement a Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG).

3. What obligations should schools have to alert teachers, parents/carers, other schools (for example, where a student changes schools or progresses to secondary school) and other professionals when a child has exhibited problem sexual behaviour, or has engaged in sexually abusive behaviour?

The protection of vulnerable children should always be the first priority. This can be done discreetly to ensure the protection of the new student population and the privacy of the child who has displayed problem sexualised behaviour in the past. I feel confident that other experts in this field can provide the Commission with excellent suggestions on this topic.

4. How should investigations into allegations of child sexual abuse be undertaken within schools, and by whom? What measures should be taken to ensure that the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of children involved are considered?

Appropriate Mandatory Reporting laws and processes should always be followed. However, there are a number of ways that educational professionals could be assisted in their professional decision making regarding alleged or suspected child sexual abuse.

a. Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG). A Mandatory Reporter Guide would greatly assist educational and other professionals help with their decision-making regarding whether or not the information they have meets the threshold for reporting their concerns to the respective Child Protection authority. It is for this reason that it is recommended that all States and Territories develop and implement an MRG.

b. Telephone Helpline Service for Professionals. The Child Abuse Prevention Service (CAPS) provides a free, national telephone Helpline service for community members and professionals to call and seek support and guidance in relation to child protection related matters. This service regularly receives telephone calls from educational and allied professionals seeking someone to “run the situation by” before determining their next course of action. CAPS Telephone Helpline staff consistently receive positive feedback for the help they have provided in what are sometimes very complex situations. The CAPS Helpline service is currently unfunded. It is recommended that the service receive funding so that it can continue to operate and provide this vitally important community and professional service.

6. Are there barriers which might prevent or limit appropriate and timely sharing of information about child sexual abuse (whether perpetrated by adults or other children) in school contexts? If so, do such barriers differ depending on which individuals, bodies or jurisdictions are involved (for example: sharing within and between schools, between schools and parents/carers, between schools and government agencies, regulators and oversight bodies, or across jurisdictions)? How could such barriers be addressed?

Great care must be taken when informing parents and caregivers of allegations made by a child of sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member. If the child discloses sexual abuse at school, it is vitally important that children are interviewed by the relevant Department of Child Protection investigators before their parents/carers are informed, as there may be a risk that the parents will
threaten the child not to disclose before the interview takes place and the child may retract their disclosure or fail to repeat the information to the authorities. It is vitally important that all professionals involved are mindful of the necessity of this as failure to do so can result in tragic consequences for the child.
REFERENCES


BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Please see Development, evaluation and revision of the school-based child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (CSAPP Project) for a comprehensive Literature Review on the topic of school-based sexual abuse prevention education, and the References section for an extensive Bibliography.